

Earthbound Expeditions

Gokyo Lakes and Gokyo Ri Trek

15 days, from US$1,787 per person

Duration
15 days

Grade
Strenuous

Max altitude
5,357 m

Start and end
Kathmandu

On the trail
4 to 6 hours a day

Best season
Mar to May, Sep to Nov

Accommodation
Teahouses

Meals
All meals on the trek

Group size
Up to 8

Getting there
Fly to Lukla

Gokyo Lakes and Gokyo Ri Trek Overview

Six turquoise lakes, the longest glacier in Nepal, and a summit view of four of the six highest mountains in the world. The Everest region with far fewer trekkers.

Trek overview

This trek visits the other main valley of the Khumbu. You fly to Lukla and walk for two days to Namche, as on every Everest trek, and on day 6 the trail divides: right for Base Camp, left for Gokyo. Five more days take you up beside the Ngozumpa Glacier, past a chain of six turquoise lakes, to a village on the shore of the third lake at 4,790 m, below a hill with one of the best views in Nepal.

Gokyo compared with Base Camp

Base Camp is a destination rather than a viewpoint: you stand on the moraine at 5,364 m below the Khumbu Icefall, and you cannot see Everest from there. From Gokyo Ri, at 5,357 m, you can see Everest, Lhotse, Makalu and Cho Oyu, four of the six highest mountains in the world, with the lakes and a 36 km glacier below. Base Camp is the more famous destination and Gokyo has the better view, and a significant number of people who have done both treks say they would choose this one if they were to repeat one.

Who this trip is for

This trek requires the same fitness as the classic Base Camp trek: five or six hours of walking a day for eleven days at altitude. It particularly suits two groups: people who have already been to Base Camp and want to see more of the Khumbu, and people who want to avoid the October crowds on the Base Camp trail. This valley has far fewer trekkers.

The Gokyo lakes

Six lakes lie along the valley, fed by the Ngozumpa Glacier and held in place by its moraine, and together they form the highest freshwater lake system in the world. Gokyo village is on the third lake, Dudh Pokhari. The lakes are a Ramsar wetland site and are sacred to both Hindus and Buddhists, which is why there is a small shrine at the third lake and why people bathe there in August, at 4,790 m.

Key highlights of the Gokyo Lakes and Gokyo Ri Trek

- Gokyo Ri (5,357 m), with four 8,000 m peaks visible from one summit
- The six Gokyo lakes, the highest freshwater lake system in the world
- The 36 km Ngozumpa Glacier
- A valley with far fewer trekkers than the Base Camp route

Itinerary

Day	Route	Hours	Distance	Altitude
1	Arrive Kathmandu	-	-	1,400 m
2	Kathmandu valley sites	-	-	1,400 m
3	Fly to Lukla, walk to Phakding	3–4 hrs	8 km	2,651 m
4	Phakding to Namche Bazaar	6–7 hrs	11 km	3,440 m

5	Namche, acclimatisation day	2–4 hrs	-	3,440 m
6	Namche to Dole, over Mong La	5–6 hrs	12 km	4,110 m
7	Dole to Machhermo	4–5 hrs	7 km	4,470 m
8	Machhermo to Gokyo, past three lakes	4–5 hrs	9 km	4,790 m
9	Gokyo Ri at dawn	4–5 hrs	5 km	5,357 m
10	Fourth and fifth lakes, Scoundrel's Viewpoint	5–6 hrs	12 km	5,000 m
11	Gokyo to Dole	5–6 hrs	16 km	4,110 m
12	Dole to Namche	5–6 hrs	12 km	3,440 m
13	Namche to Lukla	6–7 hrs	13 km	2,840 m
14	Fly to Kathmandu	-	-	1,400 m
15	Fly home	-	-	-

Day 1

Arrive in Kathmandu

We meet you at the airport and take you to your hotel. In the evening, we go through the trek, check your equipment and weigh your bag, because the Lukla baggage allowance is strictly enforced.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: None, arrival day Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Dinner

Day 2

Kathmandu Valley sightseeing

Visit the historic sites of the valley: the hilltop stupa at Swayambhunath, the riverside temples at Pashupatinath, the great dome of Boudhanath and the carved squares of Patan. A good way to recover from the flight.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: Easy walking, 2–3 hrs Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 3

Fly to Lukla and trek to Phakding

After the mountain flight, walk gently downhill for half a day beside the Dudh Koshi. This is easy walking, and the same first afternoon as on every Khumbu trek.

Altitude: 2,651 m On foot: 8 km, 3–4 hrs Night: Teahouse, Phakding Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 4

Trek to Namche Bazaar

Cross the suspension bridges and make the long climb through pine forest to Namche. On a clear day, you have your first view of Everest on the way up. Namche is the last town with cash machines, bakeries and a bookshop.

Altitude: 3,440 m On foot: 11 km, 6–7 hrs Night: Teahouse, Namche Bazaar Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 5

Acclimatisation day in Namche Bazaar

A day to allow your body to adjust to the altitude. Climb to the viewpoint above the town for views of Everest, Lhotse and Ama Dablam, then return to Namche to sleep, following the principle of climbing high and sleeping low.

Altitude: 3,440 m On foot: Optional 2–4 hrs Night: Teahouse, Namche Bazaar Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 6

Trek to Dole

Here the Gokyo trail leaves the Base Camp route. Base Camp trekkers turn right for Tengboche; you turn left, climb past Mong La with views of the Khumbu behind you, and descend into the other branch of the Dudh Koshi valley. From here, the trail is quiet.

Altitude: 4,110 m On foot: 12 km, 5–6 hrs Night: Teahouse, Dole Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 7

Trek to Machhermo

A short day at altitude up an increasingly open valley, with Cho Oyu ahead and Kangtega behind. Machhermo is a small group of lodges in a side valley, with a Himalayan Rescue Association aid post that gives a free talk on altitude every afternoon during the season.

Altitude: 4,470 m On foot: 7 km, 4–5 hrs Night: Teahouse, Machhermo Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 8

Trek to Gokyo

The trail climbs onto the lateral moraine of the Ngozumpa, the longest glacier in Nepal, and then passes the first, second and third lakes. Gokyo village is on the shore of the third lake, which is a striking turquoise against the grey rock and white ice.

Altitude: 4,790 m On foot: 9 km, 4–5 hrs Night: Teahouse, Gokyo Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 9

Hike to Gokyo Ri

The main highlight of the trek. Climb for two to three hours in the dark up the hill behind the village to watch the sunrise from 5,357 m. The view includes Everest, Lhotse, Makalu and Cho Oyu, four of the six highest mountains in the world, from one summit, with the lakes below and the glacier stretching away to the north. It is the best viewpoint in the Khumbu, and many people consider it better than Kala Patthar.

Altitude: 5,357 m at Gokyo Ri On foot: 5 km, 4–5 hrs Night: Teahouse, Gokyo Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 10

Hike to the fourth and fifth lakes

Walk north along the edge of the glacier to the fourth and fifth lakes, and climb to Scoundrel's Viewpoint above the fifth lake for views of the north face of Everest and the full 36 kilometres of the Ngozumpa Glacier. The walk is gentler than the previous day but spends longer at altitude, and very few trekkers come here.

Altitude: 5,000 m at the fifth lake On foot: 12 km, 5–6 hrs Night: Teahouse, Gokyo Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 11

Trek to Dole

You return the way you came, but walking downhill feels very different: breathing becomes easier as you descend, the lakes are behind you and the valley opens out ahead. A long but easy day.

Altitude: 4,110 m On foot: 16 km, 5–6 hrs Night: Teahouse, Dole Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 12

Trek to Namche Bazaar

Cross back over Mong La and descend into the forest. By the afternoon, you have a hot shower, a bakery and easier breathing than at any time in the past week.

Altitude: 3,440 m On foot: 12 km, 5–6 hrs Night: Teahouse, Namche Bazaar Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 13

Trek to Lukla

The last full day on the trail, back across the bridges and through the villages to Lukla. In the evening, we have dinner with the guides and porters to mark the end of the trek.

Altitude: 2,840 m On foot: 13 km, 6–7 hrs Night: Teahouse, Lukla Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 14

Fly to Kathmandu

A short morning flight back to Kathmandu, with the rest of the day free to rest or shop. A farewell dinner in the evening.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: None, flight day Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 15

Departure

We take you to the airport. As on any Khumbu trek, allow a spare day in your wider plans in case of weather delays at Lukla.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: None, departure day Night: No overnight Meals: Breakfast

What's included

- Airport transfers & ground transport
- Licensed English-speaking guide
- Accommodation throughout the trip
- All permits & national park fees
- Meals as per the itinerary

Not included

- International flights
- Travel & rescue insurance
- Personal trekking gear
- Tips & personal expenses
- Nepal entry visa (on arrival)

Permits and other costs

Permit	Fee	Issued by
Sagarmatha National Park entry permit. SAARC nationals pay NPR 1,500. Children under ten are free.	NPR 3,390, about $25	Kathmandu, or at Monjo on the way in
Khumbu Pasang Lhamu Rural Municipality permit. Covers the first four weeks, then NPR 2,500 after that.	NPR 2,000, about $15	Lukla, on arrival

TIMS card. No longer required in the Khumbu since 2018. It was replaced by the municipality permit above. You do not need to buy one for this trek.	Not required	-

Other cost	Amount	Note
Lukla flight, both ways	$350–420	about $500 via Manthali in peak season
Sagarmatha National Park permit	$25	NPR 3,390
Khumbu Pasang Lhamu permit	$15	NPR 2,000, the local municipality permit
Teahouse bed, Phakding to Namche	$5–12 a night	The same as on any Khumbu trek
Teahouse bed at Gokyo	$15–30 a night	More expensive than Gorak Shep. There are few lodges, no alternative village, and they are fully booked in October
Food on the trail	$25–35 a day	Three meals a day and tea, no alcohol
Licensed guide	$30–40 a day	Including their accommodation and meals
Porter, one per two trekkers	$22–28 a day	Including their accommodation and meals
Kathmandu hotel	$40–70 a night	Three-star, three nights
Travel insurance to 6,000 m	$120–200	Must cover helicopter rescue
Hot shower, charging, wifi	$3–8 each, each time	Not included, paid in cash
Tips, guide and porter	$150–250	Per trekker, at the end

Packing list

Baggage weight limits

Your porter carries a maximum of 20 kg, shared between two trekkers. The Lukla flight allows 15 kg in total, 10 kg checked and 5 kg as hand luggage, and all baggage is weighed. Anything you do not take on the trek is stored free at our Kathmandu office, and we provide the duffel bag, the sleeping bag and the down jacket.

Head and eyes

- Sun hat with a brim, and a warm hat that covers your ears
- Two buffs or neck gaiters
- Category 3 or 4 sunglasses. Snow glare at this altitude is severe
- Headtorch and spare batteries
- SPF 50 sunscreen and lip balm with sun protection

Clothing

- Three or four merino or synthetic base layers, not cotton
- Two mid layers: one fleece and one light insulated jacket
- Down jacket. We provide one, but bring your own if you tend to feel the cold
- Waterproof jacket and trousers that pack small
- Two pairs of trekking trousers, one of them lined
- Underwear for four or five days, washed along the way

Hands and feet

- Liner gloves and insulated outer gloves or mittens
- Trekking boots with ankle support, which must be broken in before the trek
- Four pairs of wool trekking socks
- Camp shoes or trainers for the evenings
- Gaiters, if you are travelling in winter or early spring

Bags

- Duffel bag for the porter, 20 kg maximum. We provide one
- Daypack, 30 to 35 litres, with a rain cover
- Dry bags or thick liners, as rain and snow will eventually soak through ordinary bags

Sleeping

- Sleeping bag rated to -15°C. We provide one
- Silk or cotton liner, for warmth and hygiene
- Earplugs, as teahouse walls are thin plywood

Health

- Personal first aid kit: blister plasters, tape, painkillers and rehydration salts
- Diamox, if your doctor agrees, and any regular medication
- Water purification: tablets, a filter or a SteriPen
- Hand sanitiser and wet wipes
- Throat lozenges. Almost everyone develops a dry cough at high altitude

Documents and money

- Passport valid for six months, and two photocopies
- Four passport photographs for permits
- Travel insurance certificate showing helicopter cover to 6,000 m
- $300 to $500 in small notes. The last cash machine is at Namche Bazaar

For Gokyo

- A reliable headtorch and spare batteries. The climb to Gokyo Ri starts at 4:30 am in the dark, and the zigzag path is loose

- Category 4 sunglasses. Three days beside a glacier and two frozen lakes means a great deal of reflected light
- A down jacket you can walk in and carry. You climb Gokyo Ri warm but will be cold at the top
- A power bank, because Gokyo runs on solar power and on a cloudy day there is no charging
- Two litres of insulated bottle capacity. Above the fourth lake, a bottle in an outside pocket will freeze

Altitude profile

Day	Place	Sleep at	Highest point
1	Kathmandu	1,400 m	-
2	Kathmandu	1,400 m	-
3	Phakding	2,651 m	2,840 m
4	Namche Bazaar	3,440 m	-
5	Namche Bazaar	3,440 m	3,880 m
6	Dole	4,110 m	4,200 m
7	Machhermo	4,470 m	-
8	Gokyo	4,790 m	-
9	Gokyo	4,790 m	5,357 m
10	Gokyo	4,790 m	5,000 m
11	Dole	4,110 m	-
12	Namche Bazaar	3,440 m	-
13	Lukla	2,840 m	-
14	Kathmandu	1,400 m	-

Lukla flights

Flight delays at Lukla affect every Everest trek, which is why this itinerary includes some spare time. This section explains how delays are handled.

Flights from Kathmandu or Ramechhap

Outside the two busiest periods of the year, the flight leaves from Kathmandu and takes about 35 minutes. During most of March to May and late September to November, air traffic control moves Lukla departures to Manthali airport at Ramechhap to reduce congestion at Kathmandu. This means a four to five-hour drive leaving Kathmandu at around 2 am, followed by a twenty-minute flight. The trek is the same, but the night before is much shorter. We tell you which applies to your dates before you book.

Baggage allowance of 15 kg

The allowance is 15 kg in total: 10 kg of checked baggage and 5 kg of hand luggage. Excess baggage costs about $1.50 per kilo, and the limit is enforced, because the aircraft is a nineteen-seat Twin Otter or Dornier and the runway is 527 metres long and built on a slope. Anything you do not take on the trek is stored free at our office in Kathmandu.

Flight delays

Cloud closes Lukla airport several times a month in every season. A delay of one day is common and two days is not unusual. Days 11 and 12 can be walked as one long day to make up for this. If flights are cancelled for more than three days, we change the itinerary to an equally good trek at lower altitude rather than shorten this one, at no extra charge. If you prefer to fly out by helicopter on the day, a seat costs around $500, and we can usually arrange one within a few hours.

Book your flight home with a spare day

Whatever your itinerary says, book an international flight that leaves at least one clear day after your scheduled return to Kathmandu. This is the least expensive precaution you can take on this trip, and our most important advice.

Accommodation

Teahouse accommodation

Every night on the trail is spent in a teahouse: a family-run lodge with one warm dining room, heated by a single stove, and simple twin rooms with foam mattresses and thin walls. Bring a sleeping bag. At Phakding, Namche and Lukla, most rooms have a private bathroom, and Namche has good hot showers and charging.

Accommodation on the Gokyo route

Above Namche, there are fewer lodges than on the Base Camp trail, and they are quieter. At Dole and Machhermo, bathrooms are shared, and the rooms are cold once the dining room stove goes out. Machhermo has an aid post next door. At Gokyo, you spend three nights in a lodge on the lake shore, with shared bathrooms and a hot shower for a fee. Charging and wifi are paid for separately. The Gokyo lodges are fully booked in October, which is why we book them in advance.

Where	Nights	Type	Room	Bathroom
Kathmandu	3	Three-star hotel	Twin or double	Private, hot water
Phakding	1	Teahouse	Twin	Private in most lodges
Namche Bazaar	3	Teahouse	Twin	Private, hot shower for a fee
Dole	2	Teahouse	Twin	Shared
Machhermo	1	Teahouse, with an aid post next door	Twin	Shared
Gokyo	3	Teahouse on the lake shore	Twin, fully booked in October	Shared, hot shower for a fee
Lukla	1	Teahouse	Twin	Private

Heating
One stove in the dining room, lit at dusk. Bedrooms are not heated at any altitude.

Hot shower
Up to Gokyo, $5 to $8, heated by gas or solar. None above Gokyo.

Charging
$3 to $5 per device in the dining room. Gokyo runs on solar power, and on a cloudy day there is no charging, so bring a power bank and keep it in your sleeping bag at night.

Wifi
Everest Link cards cost about $20 for 10 GB and work as far as Gokyo, though the connection is poor.

Phone signal
Ncell and NTC cover most of the route to Machhermo, and Gokyo has patchy coverage from the ridge above the village.

Water
Boiled water costs $1 to $4 a litre depending on altitude. Do not drink from the lakes: they are a Ramsar site and a sacred site, and you should not wash in them either.

Sleeping bag
Provided, rated to -15°C, for use during the trek and returned at the end.

Bedding
A mattress, a pillow and a blanket. Use your sleeping bag on top of these, not instead of them.

Meals

Meal	Time	What it is like
Breakfast	7:00–7:30	Porridge, Tibetan bread, eggs, chapati, pancakes, tea or coffee
Lunch	12:00–13:00	Dal bhat, fried rice, noodles, soup, momo and potatoes cooked in many ways
Dinner	18:30–19:30	Soup to start, then dal bhat, pasta, thukpa, or curry and rice
Tea	on arrival	Black, milk, lemon, ginger or masala tea. Included at every stop.

Diet	How we manage it
Vegetarian	Easy throughout the trek. Dal bhat is vegetarian and is the best dish on the menu.
Vegan	Manageable with advance notice. Tell us when you book so the guide can order ahead.
Gluten free	Rice, dal, potatoes and eggs are safe. Bread, noodles and momo are not, and cross-contamination in a teahouse kitchen cannot be ruled out.
Halal	There is no certified halal kitchen on the route. A vegetarian diet is the practical option.
Meat	Available, but we advise against eating meat above Namche, as it is carried up for two days without refrigeration.

A typical day

Time	What happens
6:00	Tea in your room, and a bowl of warm water to wash in
6:30	Pack, and put the duffel outside your door for the porter
7:00	Breakfast together in the dining room
8:00	On the trail. The guide sets a slow, steady pace

12:00	Lunch at a teahouse on the route, for about an hour
13:00	Two to four more hours of walking, depending on the day
15:30	Arrive at the teahouse for tea, choose a bed, wash, and rest if you need to
17:00	Oxygen saturation and pulse measured and recorded
18:30	Dinner, and a briefing from the guide on the next day
20:30	Bed. At 4,000 m, most people are asleep by 9 pm

Difficulty and preparation

Difficulty 4 of 5

As demanding as the Base Camp trek, with a steeper middle section and a better view.

- Four to six hours of walking a day for eleven days, slightly less than on the Base Camp trek.
- The climb up Gokyo Ri is 570 m of steep zigzags starting at 4,790 m, in the dark, and it is the hardest two hours of the trip.
- You sleep three nights at 4,790 m, which is higher than any overnight stop on the Base Camp route except Gorak Shep, and for longer.
- There is nothing technical on this itinerary: no ropes, no crampons and no passes. Adding the Renjo La or the Cho La changes this.
- The middle section is steeper than on the Base Camp route. From Namche to Gokyo, you gain 1,350 m in three days, where the other route has a full rest day over the same distance.

Getting ready

12 weeks before: Build endurance
Do three cardio sessions a week of 45 minutes each, at a pace at which you can still hold a conversation. Walking, cycling, swimming or rowing are all suitable. This is the most important part of your preparation.

10 weeks before: Add hills
Replace one session with an hour of hill walking, with 300 m of ascent. Add a second strength session: squats, step-ups, lunges and calf raises. Your thigh muscles work harder on descents than on climbs.

8 weeks before: Train with a pack
Start walking with the daypack you will use, loaded to 6 kg, and wear the boots you will trek in on every walk. Blisters are the second most common cause of difficulty, and they can be prevented.

6 weeks before: Walk on consecutive days
Do one long walk of four to five hours at the weekend, followed by a second walk of two to three hours the next morning. This is the most useful training session, because the trek involves walking on consecutive days.

4 weeks before: Longest walk
Walk for six to seven hours with 800 m of ascent and the same descent. If you can finish this and then eat and sleep normally, you are ready.

2 weeks before: Rest
Halve the amount of training and keep the same number of sessions. Training in the last two weeks will not make you fitter and may cause an injury. Rest well instead.

Altitude and safety

Gokyo affects the body slightly differently from the Base Camp trek. Its highest point is 200 m lower, but you stay high for longer: three consecutive nights at 4,790 m, compared with one night at 5,164 m. It also climbs more steeply through the middle section, gaining 1,350 m from Namche to Gokyo over three days, where the Base Camp route has a full rest day over the same distance. To compensate, the two days at the top follow best practice: on day 9 you climb 570 m above your overnight altitude and return to it, and on day 10 you climb 200 m above it and return again. These two days give excellent acclimatisation, and they are why we do not offer a twelve-day version of this trek.

What to watch for

- A headache that does not improve with water and paracetamol
- Nausea, or no appetite when you should be hungry
- Dizziness, or feeling drunk without having had any alcohol
- Breathlessness at rest, not only when climbing
- Poor sleep at Machhermo or Gokyo, waking short of breath
- A dry cough that gets worse over a day
- Loss of coordination, which means you must descend immediately

How to prevent it

- Attend the Himalayan Rescue Association talk at Machhermo. It is free, it is given by a doctor, and it is included in our itinerary for good reason.
- Walk slowly on day 6. From Namche to Dole, you gain 670 m, and this is the day people most often push too hard.
- Drink three to four litres of water a day, even if you do not feel thirsty.
- Eat at Gokyo even when you do not feel like it. Three nights at 4,790 m reduces your appetite before anything else.
- Avoid alcohol above Namche, and do not take sleeping pills at any altitude.
- If the Gokyo Ri climb on day 9 goes badly, do not walk to the fifth lake on day 10. Rest at the lodge instead.

What we do

1. Daily health checks

Above Namche, your guide carries a pulse oximeter and measures your oxygen saturation and pulse every evening, and again on any morning when you feel unwell. The readings are recorded, so any decline over the three nights at Gokyo is clearly visible.

2. Doctor at Machhermo

The Himalayan Rescue Association aid post at Machhermo, at 4,470 m, is staffed by volunteer doctors in both trekking seasons and is on our route on day 7 and again on the way down. This trek has better medical cover on the ascent than the Base Camp route.

3. Mild symptoms

We descend 320 metres to the aid post at Machhermo. Most cases resolve here, and the trekker climbs back up the next day. The itinerary has enough spare time to allow this.

4. Serious symptoms
Dole, at 4,110 m, is a long day from Gokyo, and Namche, at 3,440 m, is two days. Descent is the only effective treatment, and the decision is made by the guide, not by a vote.

5. Helicopter evacuation
Helicopters can land at Gokyo, Machhermo and Dole and reach Kathmandu in about an hour. This is why you need insurance: an evacuation costs $3,000 to $5,000, and the helicopter will not fly without a payment guarantee.

Weather by month

This is the Khumbu weather table. On this trek, check the winter months carefully, because the lakes freeze and many lodges at the top of the valley close.

Month	Daytime on the trail	Night-time on the trail	Night at Gokyo	Conditions	Note
January	4°C	-10°C	-20°C	Hard	Clear and extremely cold. Most lodges above Dingboche are closed.
February	6°C	-8°C	-18°C	Hard	Cold and quiet, with the clearest air of the year.
March	10°C	-5°C	-15°C	Good	The season begins. Cold at night, fewer trekkers, and rhododendrons starting to flower at lower altitudes.
April	13°C	-2°C	-12°C	Best	The best month. Warm days, stable weather, and the forests below Namche are in flower.
May	15°C	1°C	-10°C	Best	The warmest walking of the year. Hazier by late May as the monsoon approaches.
June	16°C	4°C	-6°C	Hard	The monsoon arrives. Cloud, leeches at lower altitudes, and flights are often cancelled.
July	16°C	5°C	-5°C	We do not run it	We do not run this trek in this month. Cloud hides the mountains and flights are unreliable.
August	16°C	5°C	-5°C	We do not run it	Similar to July. Cloud hides the mountains.
September	14°C	2°C	-8°C	Good	The monsoon clears during the month. Late September is green and clear.
October	12°C	-3°C	-14°C	Best	The busiest and most reliable month. Book several months ahead.
November	9°C	-7°C	-17°C	Best	Cold, very quiet by the end of the month, and the clearest skies of the autumn.

December	6°C	-9°C	-19°C	Hard	Clear and very cold. Possible with the right equipment, and there are few other trekkers.

Averages from Nepal DHM station data for the Khumbu. Any given week can be ten degrees either side, and three nights at 4,790 m is colder than the numbers make it sound.

Guides and porters

Your guide

A government-licensed guide with wilderness first aid training leads every departure, and there is one porter for every two trekkers. A second guide joins from 9 trekkers, so that nobody is ever alone at the back of the group. Our guides come from the region you trek through.

Porters and luggage

Each porter carries 20 kg, which is your duffel bag and one other. This is below the 25 kg limit set by the trekking association and well below the loads you will see on the trail. If your bag is overweight, the load is split rather than added to. Porters carry duffel bags, not daypacks: you carry your own water, camera, jacket and snacks for the day.

Staff pay and insurance

Salary, insurance, food and accommodation for every guide and porter are included in the price you pay, and are not requested from you on the trail. All staff are insured for altitude and helicopter evacuation on the same terms we require of you. The trekking industry has a long history of porters carrying too much, in poor footwear, for very low pay. Including fair pay in the package price is the way to avoid this.

Tipping

Tipping is customary but not compulsory, and it never replaces wages. On this trip, $150 to $250 per traveller for the whole team is usual, given together on the last evening rather than daily. Your guide will not ask for a tip and would prefer that it is not given in front of the group.

The Gokyo Ri climb

You leave the lodge at 4:30 am with a headtorch for a climb of two to three hours on steep zigzags up the hill behind the village, and the sun rises over Everest while you are at the top, at 5,357 m. It is cold and there is no shelter at the top, so carry your down jacket in your pack and put it on when you stop. You are back at the lodge for a second breakfast by 9 am.

The fifth lake

Day 10 is longer and gentler and spends more of the day at altitude: you walk north along the edge of the Ngozumpa Glacier to the fourth and fifth lakes, then climb onto the moraine at Scoundrel's Viewpoint for views of the north face of Everest and the full 36 kilometres of the glacier. Very few trekkers walk this route, which makes for a quiet day.

Responsible travel

Drinking water

A traveller drinking bottled water uses around 35 plastic bottles on this trip, each of which was carried in and must be carried out again. Boiled water is available at every lodge for one or two dollars a litre, and we ask you to buy that instead. Bring water purification as a backup.

Waste

We carry out everything we bring in that is not food. The Khumbu has a waste problem that it did not create and cannot solve alone, and every operator should avoid adding to it.

Supporting local communities

The lodges are family businesses in the villages you pass through. The guides and porters live in this district. Permit fees fund Sagarmatha National Park and the Khumbu Pasang Lhamu Rural Municipality. Almost everything you pay is spent within a few days' walk of the trail, which is a good reason to book with a Nepali operator rather than a foreign one that subcontracts to a local company.

Local customs

Ask before photographing anyone. Stand on the mountain side of the trail, not the drop side, when a mule train passes. Monasteries welcome visitors but are places of worship: remove your hat and shoes, and if a service is taking place, wait.

Respecting the lakes

The Gokyo lakes are a Ramsar wetland site and are sacred to both Hindus and Buddhists; there is a shrine at the third lake, and people bathe there in August as an act of worship. Do not wash yourself or anything else in the lakes, and do not take water from them. Boiled water at the lodge costs about a dollar. This rule exists out of respect for local beliefs.

Booking and payment

How to book

Write to us or send a WhatsApp message with your approximate travel dates. You will receive a reply from someone who has been on this trek. Nothing is payable at this stage, and there is no obligation until you pay a deposit.

Deposit

A 30% deposit secures your dates, and the balance is due on arrival in Kathmandu, in cash or by card. At the same time, we ask for a copy of your passport, your insurance certificate and any dietary or medical information.

Payment

You can pay by bank transfer or by card through a secure link. Card payments carry a bank fee of about 4 per cent, which we show you before you pay. The balance in Kathmandu can be paid in US dollars, pounds, euros or Nepali rupees.

Cancellation

If you cancel more than 30 days before departure, your deposit can be transferred to any other date or trip we run, with no time limit. If you cancel within 30 days, the deposit is kept, because the permits, flights and crew have been booked by then. If we cancel for any reason other than weather, you receive a full refund.

Private and group departures

Both cost the same for a group of five or more. A private departure runs on your dates at your pace and can be arranged for one person. A group departure runs on the dates in the table above. Most travellers book privately, and many are surprised that it costs no more.

Late bookings

Outside October, two weeks' notice is usually enough. For October, we need two months' notice, because of limited accommodation at Gokyo rather than the flights: it is a small village with only a few lodges and no alternative village nearby, and groups arriving late in the day in peak season have slept in dining rooms.

Optional extras

Renjo La, returning through Thame

from $420, +3 days

Cross the 5,340 m Renjo La west from Gokyo and descend the Bhote Koshi valley through Thame, the old salt-trading village and home of a remarkable number of Everest summiteers. It turns the trek into a loop and is the best extension to this trek.

Cho La and Everest Base Camp

from $640, +5 days

Cross the 5,420 m Cho La east from Gokyo and join the Base Camp route at Dzongla. Both valleys and both viewpoints in one trip. A demanding extension, and a popular Khumbu combination.

An extra night at Gokyo

$110, +1 day

This allows you to do the Gokyo Ri climb and the walk to the fifth lake on separate days. The two main days are otherwise consecutive at 4,790 m, so this is a very good-value extra.

Helicopter from Gokyo

from $2,900 for the aircraft, saves 3 days

Priced for the whole helicopter rather than by the seat, so it is reasonable when shared between five and expensive for one person. Dependent on the weather at 4,790 m.

Everest scenic flight

$220, 1 morning

A one-hour flight along the Himalaya from Kathmandu, with a guaranteed window seat. A good alternative if bad weather stops you reaching Lukla.

Single room in Kathmandu

$135

A room to yourself for the three hotel nights. At Gokyo, the lodges only have twin rooms and are fully booked in October, so single rooms are not available there.

Luxury lodge upgrade in the lower Khumbu

Price on request

Where the route passes a premium lodge, we book it in place of the standard teahouse. Mountain Lodges of Nepal has lodges at Lukla, Phakding, Monjo, Namche and Deboche, and Everest Summit Lodges has lodges at Lukla, Monjo, Tashinga and Pangboche. Expect warmer rooms, better beds, attached bathrooms in most rooms and a quieter dining room.

There are no premium lodges above Pangboche, so the higher nights are in standard teahouses. We confirm which lodges have rooms on your dates before you book.

Frequently asked questions

Answers to the 17 questions travellers ask us most often. If your question is not here, contact us and we will answer it.

Which is the better trek?

Base Camp is the more famous destination, and Gokyo has the better view. At Base Camp, you stand at 5,364 m on the moraine below the Khumbu Icefall, where expeditions start, but you cannot see Everest from there. From Gokyo Ri, at 5,357 m, you can see Everest, Lhotse, Makalu and Cho Oyu, four of the six highest mountains in the world, with six lakes and a 36 km glacier below. Many people who have done both treks would choose this one if they were to repeat one.

Is Gokyo quieter?

Yes, much quieter, and this is another reason people choose it. The two treks share the trail from Lukla to Namche and separate on day 6, where most trekkers head for Base Camp. From Dole upwards, the trail has far fewer trekkers, and the fourth and fifth lakes on day 10 are almost empty.

Is it easier than the Base Camp trek?

The days are slightly shorter and the highest point is slightly lower, but it is not easier. The middle section is steeper: from Namche to Gokyo, you gain 1,350 m over three days, where the Base Camp route has a full rest day over the same distance. You also sleep three nights at 4,790 m rather than one at 5,164 m, which is lower but for longer.

Can I visit both Gokyo and Base Camp?

Yes, and this is a popular Khumbu combination. Cross the Cho La at 5,420 m east from Gokyo and join the Base Camp route at Dzongla, which adds about five days. For the complete route, the twenty-two-day Three High Passes trek covers both valleys and all three passes.

What is the climb to Gokyo Ri like?

You leave the lodge at 4:30 am with a headtorch for two to three hours of steep, loose zigzags up the hill, starting from 4,790 m. These are the hardest two hours of the trek, and the sun rises over Everest while you are at the top. Carry your down jacket in your pack, as there is no shelter and you will cool down quickly.

Is the fifth lake day worth it?

Yes. It is one of the most rewarding days in the Khumbu and is often overlooked. It is longer and gentler than the climb to Gokyo Ri, spends more of the day at altitude, and ends on the moraine at Scoundrel's Viewpoint, with views of the north face of Everest and the full length of the Ngozumpa Glacier. Very few trekkers go there, and many consider it the better of the two mornings.

Can I swim in the lakes?

No, and please do not wash in them either. They are a Ramsar wetland site and sacred to Hindus and Buddhists, with a shrine at the third lake where people bathe in August as an act of worship. Boiled water is available at the lodges for one or two dollars a litre.

How many lakes will I see?

You see three lakes on the way in on day 8, and the fourth and fifth on day 10. The sixth lake is further north, a long day beyond the fifth. It is not included, but we can add it if you wish.

Is there a doctor on this route?

Yes, at Machhermo, which is an advantage of this valley. The Himalayan Rescue Association runs an aid post there at 4,470 m, staffed by volunteer doctors in both seasons, with a free talk on altitude every afternoon. It is on our route on day 7 and again on the way down, which gives better medical cover on the ascent than the Base Camp trail has.

Why are there three nights at 4,790 m?

This is deliberate. Days 9 and 10 both climb well above your overnight altitude and return to it, following the principle of climbing high and sleeping low, which gives excellent acclimatisation. It is also why we do not offer a twelve-day version: the days at Gokyo are the main part of the trek.

Do I need insurance covering helicopter rescue?

Yes, with cover to 6,000 m, and it is a condition of booking. A rescue from Gokyo to Kathmandu costs $3,000 to $5,000, and the helicopter will not fly without a payment guarantee, so we ask to see your insurance certificate.

What are the lodges like?

The lodges are the same as on the Base Camp route until day 6, and simpler after that. Dole and Machhermo are basic but adequate. Gokyo has a small number of lodges on the shore of the third lake, which are reasonably comfortable, run on solar power and are fully booked in October. There is no other village nearby, which is the main logistical risk on this trek.

Will there be a bed at Gokyo?

In October, securing beds at Gokyo is our main planning priority. Our guides radio ahead to book, and groups arriving without a booking in peak season have slept in dining rooms. This is why we ask for two months' notice for an October departure, compared with two weeks for the rest of the year.

Is there a spare day for Lukla weather?

There is no formal spare day, but days 11 and 12 can be walked as one long day back to Namche if a flight delay has cost you time. As on every Khumbu trek, book your international flight home with at least one clear day after the end of this itinerary.

When should I go?

April and October are the most reliable months, and November is the clearest and quietest. Avoid mid-winter on this trek: the lakes freeze, the top of the valley empties, and several lodges at Gokyo close.

Which permits do I need?

You need two permits: the Sagarmatha National Park permit at NPR 3,390 and the Khumbu Pasang Lhamu Rural Municipality permit at NPR 2,000. Both are included. A TIMS card has not been required in the Khumbu since 2018.

What should I add if I have more days?

We recommend the Renjo La. Crossing this 5,340 m pass west from Gokyo and descending through Thame turns the trek into a loop and adds three days. The route passes through the old salt-trading village of Thame, which has produced a remarkable number of Everest summiteers. It is the best three-day extension to any of our treks.

Photos, videos and reviews of this trip: earthbound.rajansimkhada.com/gokyo-lakes-trek